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FRANK JAMES ON THE TRAIL.



A wild cheer broke over the death-scene, and a dozen men, well-armed and mounted, appeared upon the spot.

DIME NOVELS

BOUGHT & SOLD

CHARLES BRAGIN

1525 W. 12th St.

Brooklyn 4, N. Y.

FRANK JAMES ON THE TRAIL

CHAPTER I.

"Halloo!"

Rat-a-tat-tat! rat-a-tat!

"What in the name of the fiend do you want?"

"Open the door, Jack Maguire,"

"Who to?"

"Tom Moore."

"All serene."

The above conversation took place on a dark night quite recently in an out-of-the-way place in the state of Texas.

A farm house nestled calmly in a small valley.

All was darkness. No sign of life, except the occasional neighing of a horse, or bleating of a sheep.

It was nearly eleven o'clock and the good folks in those parts had not imbibed the city habit of turning night into day.

In fact their habits might have been formed because of the old adage:

"Early to bed and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

But if you asked them, they would tell you that night was from sunset to sunrise, and that was the time to sleep.

Of course even in that peaceful Texan district there were some who wanted longer days and shorter nights, and who swore by the Irish national bard that:

"The best of all ways to lengthen our days,
Is to steal a few hours from the night, my boys."

Tom Moore was one of those roving blades who seemed as though their never required the same amount of sleep that others took.

Tom had ridden across country five miles or so to see his friend, Jack Maguire, who had been in bed close upon three hours.

Jack was a farmer.

He was also sheriff and still further was a most important man. To be chairman of the Republican County Committee, was something to be proud of; to be elected sheriff without opposition placed another feather in the cap of honest Jack, but the position he valued most and thought the best was that of captain of the "Emergency Committee of vigilants."

What a name!

What objects that committee had!

As the "Emergency Committee of Vigilants" may perhaps have something to do with our story, we may say, that it was founded by Jack Maguire.

Its objects were of a twofold character. In cases of emergency, such as a fire or flood, the Maguire Association stood ready to lend a helping hand. If a horse was stolen, chicken roosts robbed, or a child kidnapped, then the vigilants headed by Captain Jack Maguire would put on their war paint, start in pursuit of the offender, and it was even chances whether the man who was captured was handed over to Maguire, the sheriff, to be dealt with according to Texan law, or whether Captain Maguire, the vigilant, would on the

having a rope fastened, one end in a slipping noose round his neck and the other end over the branch of a tree.

In short, Maguire was not only sheriff, but was the Judge Lynch of the district as well.

We have left Tom Moore out in the cold—no, we beg pardon it's never cold in Texas—that is if we believe the glowing statements made by authority of the state legislature when inviting settlers to purchase land in the southern Paradise. Tom Moore had got off his horse, and was anxiously waiting for his friend to open the door.

Jack Maguire was in no hurry to go down stairs, but at last he opened the door, and in a half-sleepy manner invited Tom Moore inside.

That night rover gladly availed himself of the opportunity and invitation.

"Now what in the name of the fiend do you want at this unearthly hour?" asked Jack.

"Fetch out the whisky bottle my boy and I'll tell you."

Jack knew his friend of old and was convinced that it was best to obey.

"Hot or cold?" asked Jack.

"Well," drawled out Moore, "if it came to a question of likes, I should say—hot."

"All serene, my hearty, there's a fire in the range and some water in the kettle, so it won't be long before you can have your likes."

"That's good," said Moore. "Now, Jack, let's have one of those cigars for which Sheriff Maguire is so famous."

The box of cigars was produced, cigars chosen and lighted, the whisky teemed in the goblets, a taste of lemon and a lump of sugar added, and then—steaming hot water poured on the mixture, the grateful fragrance of which ascended and mingled with the tobacco smoke.

"Jack, would you like to share twenty thousand dollars with me?" asked Tom Moore, breaking the five minutes silence abruptly.

Jack turned round in his chair and faced his visitor, anxiously wondering whether he was entertaining a madman in his house.

After satisfying himself that Moore was perfectly cool, he exclaimed:

"What?"

"My dear boy," calmly replied Moore, "don't get excited, but if I can tell you where you can get twenty thousand dollars, which I could have all to myself, will you give me half?"

"Of course I will!" said the astonished Maguire mentally hoping that Mrs. Maguire was dressing and about to come down so that she might be a witness if Moore assaulted his host.

"You agree to give me half?"

"You bet I will."

"Well, then, to come to business. Frank James and two of his masked band are within five miles of us."

"By jiminy, where?"

"You know where Will Branigan lives?"

"Well, Frank is at his house."
 "By thunder, you don't say so."
 "Yes, I do."
 "Will Brannigan would never harbor Frank James," said Jack Maguire.
 "Not if he knew who he was."
 "How did you find out about Frank?"
 "I had to call on Will, and I heard two men talking—"
 "And you listened?" asked Jack.
 "Yes."
 "Well, go on. Man alive, I'm all on fire to know what you heard."
 It was evident Jack Maguire, sheriff and captain of the Emergency Committee of Vigilants, was getting excited.
 "Don't flurry yourself," coolly remarked Moore, "and I'll tell you all I heard."
 Tom then repeated the conversation to which he had been an unknown listener, and Jack became convinced that one of the men was the veritable outlaw.
 "The other man was Will Brannigan?" asked Jack.
 "No, you fool. Brannigan was a-bed, the other was Bill Polk, who is Frank James' right hand man."
 "Do you think I should call out the vigilants?"
 "Yes."
 "Are the masked outlaws well-armed and equipped?"
 "I reckon so."
 "To-morrow I'll get together a dozen men and go over to Brannigan's, and it may be a fortune to us."
 "Yes," said the calculating Tom Moore. "The rewards sum up pretty big, don't they?"
 "Rather," said Sheriff Maguire, looking at a small memorandum book. "Texas offers twenty thousand, Missouri, ten thousand, Minnesota, five thousand, and Kansas, five thousand."
 "Or a grand total of?" asked Moore.
 "Forty thousand dollars," replied Jack, "and the best of it is that it will all be paid on satisfactory proof that Frank James is dead or in jail."
 "Bravo, Jack! Give each of your vigilants a cool thousand, and we should have twenty thousand a-piece."
 "Yes, but we had better not build too much on capturing Frank. He is cunning as a serpent, and as slippery as an eel."
 "Well, I guess I'll go now," said Tom.
 "No, I hear Mrs. Maguire coming down stairs, and I know she has got a bed ready for you, so hitch up your horse in the stable, and make a night of it here," said hospitable Maguire.
 The worthies spent a jolly time, and built many a *chateau d'Espagne* before they retired to bed to catch a few hours' repose.

CHAPTER II.

Will Brannigan was a broad-shouldered, tall, sturdy Irishman.

He had left his native land because he had joined the Fenian movement, and was "wanted" by the police.

He believed in dear, old Ireland, and was one of those men of whom the peasantry are constantly singing as being:

"Dear Ireland's strength.
 Her truest strength is still
 The rough and ready, roving boys,
 Like Rory of the Hill."

Will Brannigan had met Frank James and his brother Jesse soon after he had arrived from the old world.

Will had a kindly liking for the outlaw brothers, and often helped them out of their difficulties, but would never join their band or share the plunder.

"No, Frank," Brannigan would say, "no Brannigan was ever 'wanted' for anything but political offences, and I'm not going to join you."

"Well, Will," answered Frank, "you're a good fellow, and I will never ask you again to unite your fortunes with ours."

"Remember, Frank, where I live, and if I can ever help you or your brother, rely on me," answered the warm-hearted Celt.

It was in this man's house that Tom Moore had fancied he had discovered the outlaw Nemesis.

Whilst Captain Jack Maguire was hunting up his

"Who was that fellow who was over here yesterday?" asked Frank.

"An old pal called Tom Moore," was Brannigan's answer.

"Is he safe?"

"No, not if he recognized you."

"Well, I guess he did," answered Frank.

"I feel sure of it," remarked Bill Polk.

"Then you will have to get ready for attack, for Moore would sell his God if he could," solemnly assured Brannigan.

Bill Polk had been wounded in the shoulder a few days previously, and he hoped he was going to have a few days' rest.

"We've got to move," said Frank.

"Yes, I'm ready," was Polk's reply.

"Do you feel strong enough?"

"Don't worry about me," said Polk.

The horses were brought out and saddled. Polk was helped to mount.

"Good-bye, Brannigan," called out Frank, as he commenced his journey.

"Halt!" came from a voice in the rear.

Frank James did not heed it.

"Halt!"

"Ride on, Polk, and I will cover your retreat," said generous-hearted Frank James.

"Not if I know it," was the reply.

"Crack!"

"Bang!"

"Crack!"

A volley of pistol and rifle shots whistled above their heads.

Frank slackened his speed for a moment.

Then drew his surest revolver and examined it.

"Crack!"

The report rang out almost as loud as a rifle shot.

The smoke gradually rose and lifted the veil from their eyes and a riderless horse was seen.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

"By God, I'm hit!" said Frank.

"For mercy's sake where?" asked Polk.

"One of my spurs taken off, I guess," and Frank laughed heartily to think it was no worse.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

The bullets whizzed and rattled, the reports clanged and clacked, and, as Frank jestingly said, seemed to play a death waltz.

"Men," cried Jack Maguire, "I'll give two thousand to the man who can kill that villain, Frank James."

"Come on," retorted Frank, "I'll give a leaden tonic to the one who first comes."

"Crack!"

Bill Polk had fired but not at the vigilants.

"What did you fire that way for?" hurriedly asked Frank.

"Because the scoundrel informer Tom Moore was sneaking there."

"Crack!"

Another one of Captain Maguire's Emergency Committee of Vigilants had bitten the dust. On the pursuers came.

Frank shouted back to them:

"Not a man of you will live if you continue the pursuit."

Frank halted, and then, with the speed of lightning, fired six shots at the enemy.

Two more of the vigilants were rendered powerless.

"Crack!"

"Whiz-z!"

"Bang! Crack!"

A perfect storm of bullets seemed to be falling.

Frank James had often declared he bore a charmed life and it seemed so. Not a shot but was aimed at him, and yet he was unharmed. The vigilants screamed and yelled and roared. One by one they fell, wounded, many never to rise again from their grassy bed.

Frank and Bill rode on, their horses showing no signs of fatigue. The bullets whistled over their heads. Frank James returned them with interest, and he, with his companion, rode on, gradually gaining the advantage. They came to a narrow pass. At the far end they saw a man evidently waiting for them. As they neared him, he called out:

"Halt! Who are you?"

"Tom Moore," said Frank, "and my partner is Bill Polk."

The man had raised his revolver and took aim.

"Crack!"

"Crack!"

It was a duel. The man had fired. So had Frank James. Frank and his pal rode on, there was no one to stop them, for, in the duel Frank's shot had taken effect, whilst his would-be-captor had shot wide of the mark.

For hours the pursuit was continued, but at last rest was at hand. They had ridden over a hundred miles without rest, and they needed it badly.

No pursuers were to be seen, and Frank James determined to rest for a few hours—days if need be.

Tom Morris's dead body was found in the wood.

He had died, a victim to his greed and love of money.

Captain Jack Maguire had lost seven of his men and he was shot in the wrist, temporarily disabling his left hand.

"Curse the fellow," he muttered, as he rode back home, "the devil does take good care of his own."

CHAPTER III.

A few days later Frank was alone. He had sent his faithful companion on an expedition of trust and caution.

Frank was making for the house of a Scotch settler named McVittie with whom he had left his favorite horse "Stonewall."

Walking along, Frank met and walked with a shepherd and it was fortunate that he did so. The man was one of McVittie's helps and considered the boss of great importance because he had recently been elected a justice of the peace.

"The boss will have lively times here shortly," said the help.

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Because he is making preparations for the capture of a great criminal."

"Indeed; who is it?"

"Why, Frank James the outlaw."

"Oh, that's it, is it! How do you know that Frank James is in the neighborhood?"

"Well, you know, he left his horse "Stonewall" with the boss, and it's too good a bit of horseflesh to lose."

"Yes?"

"Now, isn't it likely that Mr. James will want the horse back?"

"Yes, I should say so."

"That's what the boss thinks, and so he is determined to have the reward, and has gone to tell the police to be in readiness to catch Frank."

"Oh, the scoundrel!" muttered Frank to himself, as he walked on.

Instead of going straight up to the farm, he concealed himself in a belt of timber and waited for the approach of night-fall.

He noticed M'Vittie ride up, and remarked with disgust that the old fellow was mounted on no less a steed than Stonewall himself.

"Jee-rusalem!" mentally ejaculated Frank. "You'll never cross such a piece of stuff as that again, my bloomer. You'll sell Frank James, will you? I'll teach you a lesson that will last you longer than a plate of porridge for your breakfast, you Scotch hound! Wait till I'm on your track, Mr. M'Vittie."

Evening gradually came on, the men on the home station came in, the horses were turned into the paddock, and preparations for supper made.

Frank had brought some provisions with him, so this last operation did not tantalize him as it might otherwise have done.

At last, as darkness came on, all signs of human life about the station began to disappear.

The men had withdrawn into their huts, which were close to the main dwelling inhabited by M'Vittie.

People who have to be out by sunrise are not usually given to sit up late, and in a very short time the gleams of light that had shown through the cracks in the closed shutters faded away.

Still Frank resolved to be cautious.

He knew that the soundest slumber is that which comes after midnight, and had made up his mind not to approach the farm till that hour.

He therefore sat patiently under a tree speculating as to what means he could employ to get M'Vittie into his power,

and running over all the various punishments his ingenuity could devise as best fitted for that venerable hypocrite.

Mentally he vowed that the first task he would set about would be vengeance on the Scotchman.

Night had fallen calm and placid, and the sky was gemmed with a multitude of stars.

"I think it's safe to make a move now," thought Frank; "it must be past midnight."

Rising, he took up the saddle and stealthily approached the farm.

"If there are any dogs prowling around there may be a bit of a muss," he meditated; and with a view of meeting this emergency, he looked to his knife.

A few minutes brought him to the paddock.

Here he paused for a short time to reconnoitre.

A strong temptation stole over him to knock at M'Vittie's house and shoot the old ruffian as he appeared at the door.

It was necessary, however, to secure Stonewall in order to carry out this scheme.

Accordingly he proceeded to the paddock.

The night was a clear and brilliant one, and he had no difficulty in making out his horse amongst the others.

The next question was how to catch him.

He could not expect that the animal would come to his call, any more than a bird would wait to have salt put on its tail.

A sieve full of oats might have proved handy though.

However, the task proved an easier one than he had anticipated when he slipped the bar and entered the paddock.

Stonewall was evidently in the habit of being ridden, and had been turned out with a trail rope attached to him, to facilitate catching.

Frank profited by this to effect his capture.

"Steady, old man, steady," he whispered, as he laid his hand on Stonewall's mane.

With rapid dexterity he saddled and bridled the animal.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as he noted certain marks on the horse's withers; "so that herring-gutted old skeleton of a split-shingle couldn't ride you without getting you saddle-galled, whilst I, big and heavy as I am, never scraped an inch off your skin, my beauty. Never mind, old man, it's the last time anyone will throw a leg over you but Frank James."

As he spoke, Frank led the horse out of the paddock, the slip-bar of which he purposely omitted to replace after he had done so.

"If the old devil's beasts have strayed away a few miles by morning, why so much the better," was his reflection, as he hoisted himself into the saddle and marked with satisfaction that, owing to the exercise to which he had been put, Stonewall was in capital condition.

Again he debated whether he should ride up to the old fellow's door, and try to lure him forth so as to shoot him down.

No, that would be letting him off too easy.

He would make the Scotch traitor suffer in such a way that he should remember his act of treachery.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. M'Vittie's slumbers were not destined to be prolonged to a very late hour that night.

Just after daybreak he was aroused by hearing someone pounding away at the door of his dwelling.

"Ech, wha's there?" was his response.

"Get up, gov'nor; there's a blessed fine go," was the answer, in the voice of his overseer.

"Andrew, my mon," was his reply; "how often must I tell ye to lay aside the profane and unguidly habit o' blaspheming, which is a sair abomination baith in the sight o' the Lord, and in the lugs o' a decent douce mon like mysel'."

"Confound it all, it's enough to make an angel swear. Some fool or other has left the slip panel open, and every one of the horses are out of the paddock."

"D—!" began M'Vittie; but he checked himself just in time, with a gulp that almost made him bite his tongue off.

"Ech, now," he ejaculated as soon as he had got his breath; "but this is sair tidings, sair tidings; it's eneuch to drive a decent body clean daft, to have to deal wi' sic' a pack o' blatherin' boobies as I hae around me. Let me see wha's the gowk that has done this."

Hurrying on his garments he sallied forth, and soon a general muster of the men took place.

On being interrogated, each and all stoutly declares that the slip rail had been in its place when they had last set eyes on it.

Further cross-examination showed that three of the hands who had been the last to leave the paddock had done so in company, and that, according to their united testimony, the rail had been carefully replaced by one of them.

"Ye must one and all start awa' at aince in search o' the beasties."

The men started on their expedition, but in a few minutes returned to say that the tracks showed that a man had been to the field and saddled Stonewall and rode away.

M'Vittie determined to join in the chase, the consciousness coming over him that he had been outwitted by Frank James.

He more than ever itched to possess the reward, and swore that Frank, the outlaw, should fall a victim to his treachery.

On the next afternoon, after joining in the search, the Scotchman found himself in a narrow ravine.

To the right and left rose ridges of brown stone.

Suddenly the report of a pistol shot rang out from behind a rock.

Struck by the bullet, M'Vittie's horse staggered and dropped in its tracks as dead as a canned lobster.

M'Vittie was thrown over his horse's head and fell on his own.

The shock with which his skull came in contact with the rocks was so sharp a one that he lost all consciousness for a time.

When he recovered, it was several minutes before he could exactly realize the state of affairs.

At length consciousness returned.

He found himself lying on his back, with his head aching most horribly.

Drawing a long breath he endeavored to rise.

He could not do so.

His limbs refused to move.

He fell asleep again.

Then when he woke his senses seemed clearer.

Again he attempted to move.

Still he could not rise.

What was the matter?

Full consciousness returned, and he found that he was tightly secured.

His arms were tied to his sides.

His legs secured at the ankles.

This was past all comprehension.

The Scotchman was a hardshell Baptist, but he swore like a trooper and cursed like a Colorado miner.

Who could have done it?

And what motive could anyone have in securing him?

An hour so it seemed to him, but in reality only half an hour passed and the Scotchman almost became convinced that he was dreaming an unpleasant dream, when he turned his eyes round and then saw a man sitting quietly on a rock smoking a cigar and watching him.

"Oh, Heaven!" gasped M'Vittie.

The man was Frank James.

"Well, Mr. M'Vittie," he repeated, "how do you find yourself?"

For a moment M'Vittie's senses seemed on the point of leaving him from mingled fear and astonishment.

He managed, however, to pull himself together again.

"What, Frank James!" he ejaculated. "Ech, mon, but this is a strange meetin'. Sakes alive, what garred ye shoot the puir beastie and lap me in bonds like a sucklin' babe in its swaddlin' claithe?"

"Can't you guess?" said Frank.

"De'il a bit, mon; de'il a bit, unless ye tuik me for anither. But joost loosen these taws ye have cast about me if it's a bit crack ye're wushin' for."

"You didn't think to meet me hereabouts, eh?"

"Na, I didna, I didna even ken that ye were bock ag'in in the state, and it's little I thocht to foregather wi' ye in sic a fashion."

Frank looked at him for a little time in silence.

"What brought you here, M'Vittie?"

"Deed, it was joost a wee bit service I was doin' yer animal, Frank. Ye ken the browny beastie, it's Stonewall ye ca'd him, that ye left in my care sinsyne?"

"Yea."

"Weel, some hellicate loon has stolen him fra' the farm, and I was trackin' the villain. Sae if ye'll undo the bonds we'll just set out after him together. But I misdoubt me. Surely if ye have been lurkin' here ye must have seen him pass, the reevin' rogue."

"I've only seen one rogue to-day," said Frank with a grim earnestness; "and he's about as black-hearted a traitor as ever broke bread or swallowed porridge."

"What dy'e mean?" asked M'Vittie, who, for all his coolness, began to grow terribly uneasy.

At that moment the neigh of a horse sounded from behind the angle of the ravine.

"Why, 'tis the neigh of the beastie himself," said M'Vittie, somewhat reassured. "Ah, I'd ken it amangst a thousand. I see how it is. Ye came across the reiver, who was walkin' off wi' him."

"No," shouted Frank, throwing off all disguise; "but I have come across the scoundrel who was going to use him as bait to draw me into the hands of the traps, and by — I'm not going to leave go of him in a hurry, now I've got him. You didn't expect to drop on an old friend so soon again, did you? you blood-thirsty Scotch whelp! ain't you glad? You look it."

And James burst into a loud laugh. The terror of his quondam associate would have been ludicrous if it had not been despairing.

"Out with it, old man. Why have you taken such a fancy to Frank James, that you must track him like a spy? Yes, like a spy! D'ye hear—a spy? and you know, Mac, how Frank pays spies—eh? You've mistaken me."

"Fac or neath, I thocht it was some roving thief that had lifted your bonnie beast, my lad; and I was just—"

"Yes, I know, you were just seeing if you could see whether James was handy to fill a cellar or jail. I know ye, Andy. I'm fly to it all, and your little game too. But you haven't won the trick yet, my laddie. No, you've got a little performance to go through before them cards turn up trumps. Just get up and follow me."

"What do you want me to get up for—I may as well be where I am when I have no horse."

"Why, you don't think I'd be so cruel as to let you lie out here until the crows picked your liver out?" laughed Frank James. "Oh, dear, no, Mac, I mean to provide a lodging for you for life."

"What the deil are ye at, mon?" said M'Vittie, looking rather anxiously at Frank James, but still ignorant that his enemy was aware of his treacherous intentions.

"Up, you sneaking hound; you shall never lap my blood. D'ye think I'm not fly to your police jabberings; do you think I don't know your game for the reward? You've come for it, and my government oath, you'll have something that will show such vermin as you are what it is to meddle with the James brothers."

"I know your little game. I know how you plotted to keep the horse till I came for it, so as to hand me over to the traps. I know all about your meeting the police at the out-station. The man who stole the horse you talk of! Why, the man who stole the horse was me, and as I stood by your blooming shanty, I felt a devilish mind to put a light to the roof, and shoot you down as you came out, like the dog you are."

He paused for a moment, half choked with fury.

Then he resumed in more solemn tones.

"Only I'm very glad I didn't, for then I should have lost the chance of teaching you the very pretty little lesson of how Frank James repays treachery, which I mean to do before you're an hour older."

"But, Frank—" began M'Vittie, feebly.

"Stow it!" thundered the bushranger. "Don't try any of your gibberish with me. I ain't been very particular in my life about knocking a fellow on the head if he stood in my way, but if I did a trifle more, I never put a pal's life in my pocket and drunk out his heart's blood in the nearest saloon. No; the James boys never sold a pal or sneaked a swag. Frank always went straight at his work, whether it was a man or a bank. No; he'd stand or fall like a man, not like a cur that would bite you in your sleep, and sell your wizen to the rope as he would a bale of wool or a cask of tallow."

Thoroughly alarmed, Andrew tremulously cried:

"I dinna ken what ye are bletherin' about me betrayin' ye; it's a'together a mistake on your pairt. I'm yer friend, and

I can prove it. Let me gang and I'll gie ye any sum in reason ye could name."

"There's only one thing I mean to take from you," replied Frank James.

"And what's that?"

"Every drop of blood in your body, and every ounce of meat on your bones."

As he spoke, Frank stooped over the prostrate figure of the settler, and hoisted it to its feet.

Then throwing it on his shoulder, he carried it to the spot beyond the angle where Stonewall was tethered. The Scotchman roared loud and long, hoping, but in vain, to attract succor. A few minutes later, and M'Vittie was balancing like a sack across the saddle of the gallant animal, which Frank took by the bridle. Andrew threw himself off the animal, and fell on his face, and lay there howling and imploring for mercy, and asking wildly what Frank James was going to do.

"If you don't lie quiet in the saddle, I'm hanged if I don't drag you by this tether-rope to the lodging I'm going to give you for the night, at all events."

Groan upon groan flowed from M'Vittie's throat. He realized his prospects, and he knew his man; he also knew his man knew him. White despair enshrouded his face, the features of which were working with dread. He ceased to plead, for hope had fled. Frank threw him again across the saddle, face downward, like a sack, saying:

"Tumble again, and you'll know more of the stones than you ever yet felt."

After traveling for half an hour, they arrived at the foot of a small, isolated peak, on the flat summit of which was a solitary tree, forming a conspicuous landmark. Here Frank halted, and laughed and chuckled, while his eyes gleamed revenge. He removed M'Vittie—whose sufferings, mental and physical, had reduced him to almost a state of imbecility—from the back of Stonewall. Placing him on his own shoulder, he commenced the ascent of the peak, which was not very high, merely prominent.

The ground led very gradually up to it, and Stonewall had carried the burden up to the foot of the rock.

At length they reached the summit of the peak, which formed a small plateau.

Frank threw himself down, utter exhausted, by the side of M'Vittie, whom bruises and terror had by this time reduced to a condition of almost imbecility.

The plateau was about eight or ten feet square, and from its summit an extensive view could be obtained. The tree rooted in it was a small but strong one.

As soon as he had recovered himself, Frank rose and lifted M'Vittie to his feet. He placed the squatter against the tree and lashed him to it securely. A look of frozen terror spread over the squatter's face. He turned his eyes to Frank James, his blue lips parted, and in a husky whisper he gasped out:

"What is it ye mean to do wi' me?"

Without vouchsafing him any reply, the outlaw drew his knife.

"For mercy's sake, for pity's sake spare me; I'm no fit to dee. I'm a miserable sinner," screamed M'Vittie.

Still in silence Frank raised his knife, but instead of plunging it into M'Vittie's breast as he had anticipated, he deliberately set to work to cut away every shred of clothing the unhappy man wore, taking care at the same time not to sever his bonds.

When this was completed, and M'Vittie stood as naked as Adam before the fall, Frank returned his knife to its sheath, and said:

"I told you I meant to have every drop of blood from your body, and every ounce of flesh from your bones. I give the first to the insects and the last to the birds."

"For God's sake," yelled M'Vittie, who began to realize the awful fate awaiting him, "put your knife into me."

"No," answered Frank, "my knife for a man who fights me, and not for a sneak who wanted to earn my blood-money like you."

"Help, mercy, mercy, help, murder," yelled the settler, almost mad with fear.

"It's no use howling, M'Vittie, there's not a living soul within fifty miles of us."

The squatter made a desperate effort to free himself.

He tugged at his bonds till they buried themselves in his flesh, and then heedless of the agony he inflicted on himself he endeavored to snap them by a series of jerks.

At length he paused, exhausted and bleeding from a dozen places where they had cut through his skin.

"You won't get loose, those fastenings would hold a couple of working bullocks."

"Ye coward, ye faust-hearted coward, I spit at ye, ye dare na snub me, ye dare na," howled M'Vittie, in the hope of taunting the outlaw into using his knife.

"That cove won't fight," replied Frank, calmly.

"Kill me in mercy, mon, it's the only thing I ask o' ye, if ye've got a human heart in ye, kill me."

With his eyes protruding from his head, and his hair standing on end, M'Vittie forced this frantic appeal from between his lips, from which blood and froth were running down to his chest, that panted and heaved with his recent exertions and his present terror.

"No," answered Frank. "Good-bye. I mean to leave you as a warning to others not to play tricks on the James Boys."

With these words he turned away and began to descend the peak heedless of the wild string of prayers, blasphemies, curses and entreaties that pealed forth from the lips of the doomed wretch at its summit.

As he descended, the sounds grew fainter and fainter.

On reaching the bottom he looked up.

The figure of M'Vittie lashed to the tree trunk was plainly visible against the sky, across which clouds that indicated a storm were floating.

Frank fancied he could discern it struggling to get loose.

After gazing at it for some time he mounted Stonewall and rode onward.

As he did so one last, wild, despairing yell reached his ears.

Before nightfall a terrible storm of wind and rain broke over the mountains.

This weather lasted for several days and its effects extended over a large area.

When, after waiting a week without hearing anything of M'Vittie, his overseer made an attempt to track him, the faintest hope of doing so had vanished.

It was not until several weeks had passed that a man in search of adventure climbed the rock and beheld a sight to freeze the blood in his veins.

There was the body, or what remained of it, of M'Vittie. Eagles and other birds of prey had taken huge pieces of flesh away. And all sorts of loathsome insects were crawling over the rotting remains.

It was a terrible vengeance, and one which Jesse James would have scorned, but Frank was more cold-blooded and cruel, and woe be to those who fall a victim to the vengeance of this saturnine man.

CHAPTER V.

Mount Tabor Valley was the name of a beautiful glade in Texas.

A pretty rippling brook meandered gracefully through its grassy dells.

Ripple, ripple, the brook went on, unceasing, singing its ditty:

"Men may come, and men may go,
But I go on forever."

In this valley, by the side of the clear, crystal sheen of the brook, two men were to meet and settle their differences by a duel to the death.

The sun was dipping far below the horizon when Captain Morris and his friend rode down the glade.

"Our friends have not arrived yet, it seems," said Captain Morris.

"No, nor will they," said his companion.

"Why do you doubt?"

"Because Frank James is not fond enough of death to court it in this fashion."

"It is the boast of the outlaw that he never broke his word," replied Captain Morris.

A quarrel had taken place between Captain Morris, a settler, holding a good social position in the state, and Frank James, the notorious outlaw.

Strange as it seems, yet 'tis true, that as the quarrel became bitter, a feeling of hatred grew up in the hearts of each, and the death of one was declared necessary.

Frank challenged Captain Morris to a duel, and the gallant captain accepted the challenge, and all preliminaries were arranged.

"It will soon be too hot," remarked Morris, as he waited for the other contestant.

"Ah, here he comes," rejoined his companion.

Two horsemen were seen galloping down the hill.

"This is stupid work," said Tom Nash, who acted as second for Frank James.

"Yes, but we have naught to do with that."

"Let us get it over as soon as possible."

"Agreed."

"My man wishes to wear a mask, as he has no idea who may see him, and you know that he has reasons for not wanting to be recognized."

"Yes, if he gains the victory——"

"If?" queried Nash. "Why, my dear sir, of course he will."

"Well, we shall see."

The preliminaries were arranged, the ground marked off, and the duellists ready.

"Stop!" cried Captain Morris. "What freak is it to fight in a mask?"

"My man fights in a mask or not at all," said Nash.

"Then I won't fight," rejoined Morris.

"I thought so. You are too great a coward."

"Liar!" yelled Morris. "I will fight."

The two principals took their places at twenty paces apart.

They were to fire at the word four.

"One!" said Nash.

"Two!" came from the second accompanying Captain Morris.

"Three!"

"Four!"

"Crack!"

One report rang out on the clear silence of the night.

Captain Morris held a smoking pistol. His antagonist had not fired.

"Heavens, he is lost!" gasped Captain Morris' friend.

The captain folded his arms, and stood waiting for death.

"Shoot, Frank James, and end this farce," called out Captain Morris.

"No," answered Frank, "the duel is over."

"I demand another shot," cried Morris.

"Very well."

The pistols were loaded, the paces counted, and the seconds began to count.

"One!"

"Two!"

"Three!"

"Four?"

Again only a single shot resounded.

The masked duelist fell to the ground.

Nash uttered a fierce cry.

Captain Morris hurried forward, but before he reached the fallen duelist, a clatter of horses' hoofs was heard, and looking round they saw to their utter amazement and alarm Frank James and Bill Polk riding to the rendezvous.

Who was the masked duelist?

Frank James, who is this masked man whom I have shot?"

"I don't know," answered James, as he leaped from his horse and went to the side of the one who had taken his place in the sad duel.

Captain Morris and his friend pressed forward to see the wounded, if not killed antagonist.

The mask was torn away, and then a wild, piercing cry fell from the lips of all.

"Great Heavens! What do I see?" ejaculated Captain Morris.

"My God! Nash what is the meaning of this?" asked Frank James.

What was the meaning of this wild emotion?

Why these frantic exclamations?

Who was this masked duelist lying there in the stiffness of death that should cause strong men to weep tears of bitter agony, and make them dumb with astonishment?

It was a woman!

Strongly built, she had availed herself of her appearance and the darkness of the evening to personate the notorious outlaw, Frank James.

Who could it be?

Was there in the whole of the United States a woman so devoted, so loving and so courageous, that she would offer her life in place of a man for whose body so large a reward was offered?

"Yes! There was one!"

And that one, whose love was so matchless was——
Annie Ralston James.

The wife of the outlaw. The sharer of his troubles, the partner of his joys.

Mrs. James had returned from an expedition on which she had gone for her husband, and accidentally heard that her dear Frank was to fight a duel.

She had also heard that Captain Morris was a famous shot, and had vowed that he would kill her husband, by fair or foul means.

A letter, which Annie had written, calling Frank away to aid her out of some supposed difficulty, had the desired effect of delaying her husband.

Whilst he was away, she told her old retainer, Nash, what she intended doing.

Swore him to secrecy.

Dressed herself in male attire.

Masked.

And now was lying dead.

"Oh! my darling, my beautiful wife, my pet, to think you lie here murdered by that villain," sobbed Frank James. And then turning to Captain Morris he said: "You scoundrel, where is your manliness to fight with and kill a woman?"

"How did I know that a woman had taken your place?" asked Morris.

"You should have insisted on the mask being removed."

Morris explained the request he had made and the taunt that he was a coward.

"How did I know that you hadn't turned coward and sent one of your minions to fight me," sneered Morris.

Frank James jumped forward and would have made an end of Captain Morris had it not been for a groan which he heard.

"She's not dead!" cried out Nash.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Frank, as he forgot all about the sneering captain and took his place by the side of his wife.

Captain Morris and his friend seized this opportunity to leave the scene.

They were glad to get away with their lives.

Annie Ralston James raised herself slightly.

"Frank!"

"Annie!"

And then the wounded woman sank back again in her swoon. Frank poured a little brandy from his flask into her mouth and she quickly revived. It was found that the bullet had only inflicted a flesh wound on her shoulder, and that the force of the blow had stunned her.

In a very few minutes she was her own lively self again. Glad to think that Frank had escaped, she gloried in her exploit.

CHAPTER VI.

Captain Morris went away from Tabor Valley haboring thoughts of vengeance.

He had intended to kill Frank James, and had prepared a ruse by means of which he would succeed.

The excitement of waiting and then having to fight a masked duelist unnerved him and he forgot all about the foul play he intended. On his way, he however conferred with his friend Blair, and together they resolved to gather together a number of their friends and never rest until the whole of the Frank James' party was exterminated. The next day fortune favored them somewhat.

Bill Polk had gone some distance to obtain some liniment for Annie James' wound.

As he was returning he found himself surrounded, and before he had time to make any serious resistance—even if it would have been of any avail—he found himself bound hand and foot.

Captain Morris and his friend, Joshua Blair, took charge of the proceedings of a mock trial, and Bill Polk found himself adjudged guilty of being an outlaw and was sentenced to death.

A rope was ready, and a slip-knot made at one end. A branch of a tree convenient was to be the gallows.

"Now, boys," said Captain Morris, "before we string up the prisoner, I want to say a few words."

"Bravo for Morris!"

"Bully boy, forever!" shouted his men.

"This man, by name William Polk, is one of Frank

James' band of outlaws who call themselves the Death Avengers. Polk is Frank's head man. We have vowed to shoot, hang or drown every man of the avengers——"

"We have."

"That's so."

"Just the ticket."

"Well, boys, we are agreed on that. Now I propose we pardon this fellow——"

"What?"

"Never!"

"Listen to me and then make your remarks," continued Captain Morris. "There is a large reward offered for Frank James. It would make you all comfortable. Now we will pardon this fellow, on condition he tells us where Frank James can be found. We will then go and see if his information is correct. If so, we nab James and let this man go free. If not, why we hang Polk, and do our best to find Frank James. What say you boys?"

"I think the Captain's idea a good one," said Blair.

"So do I."

"And me."

"Begorra, I think so too," said another.

"Very well, we are all agreed," said Captain Morris.

Poor Bill Polk had been standing all the time firmly bound, with the fatal noose round his neck, the other end of the rope dangling over the branch of the tree.

Not a pleasant predicament. Hempen rope never did make a good necktie.

No one wants to try one.

Bill Polk was no exception to the rule.

By treachery to the outlaw chief he could save his life. By truth, honor and fidelity, he would, perhaps, save Frank James but his own life would be gone.

These thoughts passed through his mind as he stood there and listened to the speech of Captain Morris and the interruptions of the men.

He felt he must say something. At last he opened his mouth:

"Captain Morris and devils generally," not a very polite way to commence a speech, you will say, but wait, reader, until you get a rope round your neck and expect to feel its tightening embrace every minute and we guess you will be no more choice in your language than was Bill Polk. "You want to catch Frank James," he continued.

"Yes."

"Yes."

"That's just the ticket."

"Well, in thirty or forty years time Mr. James will be dead, and then if you go to the graveyard you can have his body if it is any good to you."

"Where is Frank James?" asked Captain Morris.

"In safety," was the reply.

"Do you know where he is?"

"Yes."

"Bravo."

"Excellent."

The vigilants or murderers, whatever you please to call them, exulted at Bill Polk's reply; their hands itched for the reward, and some even began to imagine how they would spend their share.

"Where is he?" asked Captain Morris.

"Where you can't find him."

"Will you tell us?"

"No," answered Polk.

"He wants to make better terms," whispered Joshua Blair, and then, speaking aloud, he said: "Polk, if you will take us to the place where Frank James is hidden, we will save your life and give you a thousand dollars out of the reward."

"Very generous," sneered Polk. "Now listen to me, you devils. I'm trussed like a turkey at a Thanksgiving dinner, and I get a rope round my throat to keep me upright. I know you can easily kill me if you like, but I tell you that if I had a thousand lives you could take them all before I would turn traitor and peach on the best man that I ever served under."

"Do you mean it?" asked Blair.

"Yes. I am no lying hound of a traitor."

"Then you shall die."

"All right, go ahead," coolly replied Bill Polk.

Blair stepped forward, and, with the aid of another man, began to draw at the rope which was to pull Bill Polk up in the air until he was dead.

A crackling of leaves was heard, and then the earth seemed to quake as though an army was riding over it. A wild cheer

broke over the death-scene, and a dozen well armed, appeared upon the spot.

"Long live Frank James."

"Death to the vigilants."

"To hell with Captain Morris," shouted the men, as they rode up to Judge Lynch's gallows.

The most astonished person was Bill Polk.

He had felt the rope tightening, and had nearly lost consciousness, when he felt his thongs give way before the keen edge of a knife, and realized that he was a free man.

The Morris party of vigilants leaped to their horses and rode quickly away.

They were too discomfited to offer any resistance.

Bill Polk was glad that he had been no traitor, and warmly thanked Frank James for liberating him from death.

It appeared that Will Brannigan had heard that Morris was going to waylay Bill Polk, and Brannigan thought it a friendly act to inform Frank James.

The outlaw chief wasted no time in getting his men together and starting in search of his lieutenant.

We have seen that he arrived only just in time to save Polk's life.

CHAPTER VII.

Bill Polk, when at home, lived with his mother, an aged lady, who had a small farm left her by her husband, and which her son tilled and cared for until he had joined the outlaws. Since then his career had prevented him working at home as he had done formerly.

Joshua Blair determined that Bill Polk should be captured.

He had so humiliated the band by his escape, and the outlaws were so evidently powerful that every victory they gained made resistance or an attempt to capture them still more difficult.

The large rewards offered for the capture of Frank James had let loose some of the vilest creatures that ever lived.

They were ready to commit any crime in order to find their way to the capture of Frank James.

When will governments learn that two crimes will never make justice?

Blood money!

Ay, what crimes have been committed, what desolation caused by the offer of rewards for the apprehension of criminals.

Blood money!

Aye, for the desire to obtain it innocent men have been imprisoned, and many ascended the gallows steps, their lives and liberties being sworn away by the perjurers' love of gold.

Innocent women have been left husbandless, their homes destroyed, their children made outcasts.

Girls have been forced into lives of shame and ignominy, and murder itself committed in the craving to obtain blood money.

Governments offering such large rewards, put temptations in the way of thousands of weak and criminal men.

It was so in the case of the James boys.

Hundreds of men left their business, in city and country, and gave themselves up to hunting the outlaws.

The hope of getting the reward was the actuating motive.

Out of these many a dozen became criminals of quite as black, and perhaps worse, dye than Frank and Jesse James.

Joshua Blair had neglected his farm, allowing it to go to ruin, and had become so absorbed in outlaw hunting that he committed crimes every day, and excused himself with the plea that the crimes were necessary.

He gathered round him six of the most brutal men he could trust, and confided to them that he was going to find Bill Polk and Frank James both at one time.

The proceedings were novel.

He would find Polk's mother, and compel her to tell her son's whereabouts. To find Bill, was to find Frank James. Joshua's eyes danced with delight at the thought of a task so easy.

* * * * *

"Does Mrs. Polk live here?"

"Yes, massa."

That lady came to the door when she heard someone ask her negro boy as to her whereabouts.

"I am Mrs. Polk," she said.

"Mother of Bill Polk?" asked Joshua Blair, for it was he.

"Yes. Is he well?"

"Nay, ma'am, that's what we want to know. We called to see him."

"He is not here."

"Well, where is he?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Polk.

"What! not know where Bill is?"

"I do not, indeed."

"Then I don't believe you," said Josh.

"It's the truth, sir."

"Well, we shall see. Here, boys, lend a hand, and we will find out whether this old woman knows where Bill Polk is."

Mrs. Polk was dragged outside, and by Blair's orders taken to a tree and lashed securely to it.

"Oh, heaven! What are you doing? Don't murder me," cried the poor, old woman.

"Tell us where Bill is then," said Josh.

"I—I don't know."

"I'll soon compel you to know, said Josh Blair.

Blair's companions were picked men. He knew full well that it required villain of the lowest order—brutes—to assault a woman, and he had picked his men accordingly, low, despised creatures, whom he had plied with poor whisky, that even their low, unfeeling natures might not relent at the last minute. The two ruffians dragged the half-fainting woman to a small cottonwood, to which they bound her, facing the trunk. The four remaining men sat glaring upon the scene in drunken glee. At this stage of the proceedings Joshua Blair produced a heavy driver's whip, and advanced to the side of the bound woman.

"Now, then, old lady, speak out, if you would save yourself from a good hiding."

"Heaven be merciful!" gasped the widow; "I can tell you nothing."

There was a sudden whiz, and the heavy lash cut a long welt across the shoulders of the poor woman.

"Perhaps that'll open your lips!" sneered the brutal Blair. "I've no mercy, you'll find, so speak out and tell me where Bill Polk hides himself."

"Mercy!" gasped Mrs. Polk.

Whiz came the lash. Once more a welt was raised on the back of the helpless victim, which was followed by a scream of agony that ought to have melted hearts of stone. A loud laugh came from the drunken horsemen.

"How the old hag yells. This hyar's wuth a farm, Josh," cried one of the men. "Give her the lash good. Consarn her mug, she's as bad as her cub."

Blair, insane with liquor himself, rained a dozen blows upon the swollen back of his victim, amidst the jeers and brutal laughter of his villainous confederates. The thin dress was cut to shreds, exposing the bare back of the helpless woman, which was now one mass of blood. Her cries grew fainter each minute. No longer did she beg for mercy. Her gray head, dabbled with gore, fell forward against the tree, while a gray pallor touched the wrinkled face.

"Hold up, boss," cried one of the men, at last, "don't kill the woman, Josh."

"Curse the jade! she's no better than her son."

Again the inhuman villain rained heavy blows upon the bleeding back, blows which cut no more to the soul of the poor victim. Heaven had been merciful to the wretched prisoner. The brutal villain's fury was expended at last.

"Cut her loose, boys," growled Joshua Blair. "I guess she'll speak now. It takes me to manage ugly females."

"I guess she won't speak, boss," said one of the men, as he cut the cords that bound Mrs. Polk, and laid her on the grass.

"Won't, eh? We'll see," and the inhuman wretch staggered forward and bent over the silent form on the grass.

"Eh, what's this? Playing possum, I guess."

"No," said one of the men, in an awed voice, "the old woman is dead!"

"Dead!" ejaculated Blair, starting back with a shudder.

"No, no, that can't be. Wake up, old woman. Lord a mercy! I did not mean to—kill yer."

The drunken brute grasped the woman's shoulder, and shook her sharply.

"No use, boss, she's dead as a hammer."

This fact forced itself upon the brain of Joshua Blair at last. The effect was to sober him utterly. He saw the avenging arm of the murdered woman's son upraised to strike him down, saw the dark visage of Nemesis scowling upon him, and with a wild cry he turned and reeled from

the spot, white and trembling with mortal fear. With no little difficulty did the inhuman scoundrel regain his saddle.

"Boys," said Blair, in a husky voice, "let's get out of this."

"And leave that woman there?"

"Yes, yes, come on. They'll find her there. No one will suspect us, unless—unless we have been seen here."

The villain struck his horse a sharp blow and galloped rapidly away from the scene of the murder, followed by his heartless companions.

It was a cowardly and infamous deed, one long to be remembered in the annals of the state.

The sun, now low in the heavens, hid his face under the clouds, as if to hide the horrors of the awful scene.

In single file the murderers dashed down the forest-road, never once looking behind to see if they were followed.

A tall form stood watching the band as they passed a little knoll some forty rods from the Polk farm.

Unseen by them, the man sent his eagle glances over the faces of the seven.

"Wonder what new devilry is in the wind now. Joshua Blair and his gang have not been here for nothing," muttered Brannigan, as he entered the road and hastened toward the widow's cabin.

Scarcely had the infamous gang passed from sight of the scene of the murder, when a black face peered from a clump of bushes near at hand.

Presently the body of a negro followed, and the black boy, Pompey, crept forward and stood over the form of his murdered mistress.

The slave had heard the thunder of approaching horsemen, and secreted himself, being naturally timid.

From his concealment, he had witnessed the whole scene, and trembling with terror, had crouched down close to the earth, until the murderous gang had taken their departure.

Pompey threw himself down beside his murdered mistress and was howling in true African style when Brannigan appeared suddenly upon the scene.

"Mercy sabe us, good massa," cried the negro, rolling his eyes upward and falling at the feet of the new comer.

"Let up," said Brannigan sternly. "I will not harm you if you behave yourself."

"Deed an 'deed, massa, an' I'll 'have."

Brannigan stood gazing down upon the white face of the murdered woman, not a muscle of his countenance moving, a grim, gray look settling over his rugged countenance.

Silent and motionless he stood for some minutes. The horrors of the situation were too great for words just then.

"Pompey, who perpetrated this crime?"

He had found his voice at last.

"Heaben sabe us, massa, 'twas that mean t'ief, Josh Blair."

"He had six companions?"

"Yes, massa."

Brannigan drew forth a small flat book, together with a pencil. With slow, calm deliberation he jotted down seven names.

"I know them, every one," he muttered. "I saw each face, seven in all, with Joshua Blair in the van. This will prove a dear job for you, gentlemen, a dear job, indeed."

Silence fell over the scene then.

Bending down the man raised the bruised and bleeding victim of Blair's inhuman cruelty and bore her into the house. On a lounge in the little front room the hunter placed his burden, then he ordered Pompey, who had followed him, to bring water.

The negro complied and Brannigan proceeded to wash the blood from the lacerated back of the dead woman.

After this was done, he threw a light shawl over the silent form and then turned to Pompey.

"You will remain here and watch until I return."

"Golly, massa, I darsent. I—them murderin' raskils may come back—"

"No danger of that, blackskin," returned Brannigan.

"The work they came to do is finished, and not one of them will dare show himself here again. You must remain until I bring help."

Brannigan grasped his rifle and was about to depart, when a light, quick step fell on his ear, a shadow darkened the doorway, and a tall man crossed the threshold of the shadowed home.

"Mother; where is she?" questioned the eager voice of Bill Polk. "I can stop but a minute. I know the danger, yet I must see her once more. Why do you look so strange, Will? What has happened? Where is my mother?"

With averted face the man pointed to the couch, then, with a groan, passed from the room.

When Bill Polk came out of the room where was laid the corpse of his mother, he was a changed man.

Every bit of good in his nature was obliterated.

He staggered toward Brannigan and then grasped the door-casing and drew himself upright.

"Aye!" exclaimed Polk, with flaming eyes and rigid form, "for me there is but one object in life now. They have proclaimed me an outlaw, I will earn the title in good truth."

"The State of Texas shall shudder when the name of Bill Polk is spoken. The land shall fatten on the blood of the infamous scoundrels who have slaughtered my blessed mother, and wrenched the last spark of human feeling from my bosom."

"Revenge! Aye, ample and bitter shall it be! until, for every drop of my sainted mother's blood, a thousand shall redden the soil of Texas."

"Captain Morris, this is your work, the work of your minions, and I here and now, before Heaven, hold you to strict accountability for this red ruin, this treacherous, devilish murder."

Brannigan shuddered at the fierce invective, the wild, vengeful look that accompanied the words of the hunted outlaw.

He could well understand the feeling that prompted the wild words, nor did Brannigan doubt the determination of the speaker to carry them into execution.

The shadows of night fell over the clearing ere Bill Polk and his friend left the spot.

In the deepening shadows the two men stood beside a new-made grave in which lay buried everything that made life dear to one of them.

"Your hand, Brannigan," said Bill Polk, in a low, husky voice.

Two hands were clasped over the fresh mound.

"Standing here, under the blue arch of heaven, I swear to avenge my murdered parent," said Bill Polk, in low, steady tones. "Seven lives for the one—seven! Aye, and then my reckoning will come with Captain Morris, for he is not guiltless."

"I will help you to fulfill the oath to the uttermost," said Brannigan, as their clasped hands fell apart.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Bill Polk returned to the outlaw's camp he was accompanied by Will Brannigan.

"Frank, my boy," said Brannigan, "I am outlawed as well as you, for I have sworn to help exterminate men who murder innocent women."

"I am on the track of those who killed my brother," said Frank, "and then I, too, will follow Morris and his deputy, Josh Blair, to the death."

"Thanks, James," said Bill; "I knew I could count on you."

"We have a journey before us, and I propose we start at once," said Frank James. "I want to get into Missouri as soon as possible."

The next day a dozen men, all well seated on the best of horseflesh, were cantering along the road leading away from Texas, and into the delightful scenery of southern Arkansas.

Accompanying the twelve men, was one lady.

She was the wife of Frank James, and determined to go with him and share his new trials and dangers.

When the party arrived at Toxarkana, Frank persuaded his wife to take the cars to St. Louis, where he promised to join her as early as possible.

Poor Annie did not like the idea of leaving Frank, but he promised that he would use extra care, and would not enter into any more danger than possible. This had to suffice, and the faithful wife who had forsaken friends, home and society for the sake of her outlaw husband, journeyed with far more comfort on the luxurious palace cars on the St. Louis and Southern railroad, than she could possibly have done on horseback. When she had left, Frank told his pals that it would be just as well to get a little money before they proceeded any further. All agreed with this proposition, and it was resolved that the coach running across county should be the first means resorted to.

* * * * *

The stage coach left Toxarkana well loaded with passengers. All kinds and conditions of men were there.

Yankées from New England, greasers from Mexico, and even miners from Arizona. Never before had the coach taken such a valuable load.

By some means Frank James had managed in the city to obtain information of the names and property to be carried. The coach driver smelt a rat, and prepared accordingly.

Turning to his passengers after they were a good many miles on the road, he said:

"Shouldn't wonder if we met some road agents, so take advice. Those of yer thet want to save yer watches, put 'em in yer boot-top, and manage to conceal yer small change, and d—n it, do it right quick——"

"Whoa-ho!" he continued, this time addressing his horses. "What's up wi' yer? Now, then, yer brutes."

The horses plunged and reared, and then stopped.

"Now, then, you outsiders, up with your hands," shouted a voice from the brush.

A dozen rifles were seen pointed at the coach, and the passengers thought it was better to obey.

"Now you insiders, throw out your irons, there's six of you got them."

Two revolvers were thrown out of the coach.

"Come, no nonsense, let's have some more or we will make a sieve of the coach with our bullets."

At last all had thrown out their revolvers, and the road agents, who were headed by Frank James in person, rode up to the coach and took possession of money and watches which hitherto had belonged to the passengers in that coach.

"Frank James, by the eternal" exclaimed one of the passengers.

"Yes, that is my name," incautiously replied the outlaw.

The coach dashed away with the passengers' pockets lighter than before, and Frank James felt that his acknowledgement of his identity would lead to trouble.

The whole country was soon in a state of terror and alarm. These atrocious crimes, attributed by public opinion to one man, caused a universal feeling of dread, and people asked themselves—what next? The police were urged by the government to find the miscreant, but his cunning was too great.

Besides, in these days there is such extent of bush that, with a population scattered about sympathizing with crime, he had many accomplices.

Still Frank, on this occasion, determined to be quiet for a little while.

Frank, in the district where he had concealed himself with his associates, had made himself a rough hut. It was so situated that anyone could be seen at a quarter of a mile off, when he could get into accessible hiding-places. But his comrades were always ready to give him warning.

The time fixed on for the attack on Pine Bluff, as the spot was called, rapidly approached. Frank made an appointment with his men at a point six miles from the place. It was a very wooded spot on the bank of a small river. It was in the center of a number of sheep runs, and was accounted a rather populated place.

Frank James had provided himself with a mask and wore a wig of gray hair. No one who did not know him would have for one moment believed in the deception. One young man had gone forward as scout, and when they got within a short distance from the spot, came and told them that the coast was clear. In a few minutes more twelve heavily-armed men surrounded the bank, Frank and five others alighting and entering.

The bank was a quiet, private-looking house, and, with the exception of the word "bank," might be taken for the village doctor's residence.

A few loiterers are always at the cottage doors; and the post office is always full of gossips. The arrival of anyone is an event. His appearance and business is soon ferreted out, and form interesting topics of discussion for days. The locality is generally characterized by a stagnant calm, and generally remains in profound repose.

About mid-day several horsemen were seen quietly riding down Market street, smoking short pipes, and quietly regarding the inhabitants.

They passed the bank and approached the police station, where two of the mounted force were also engaged in the arduous duty of "blowing a cloud." Suddenly pulling up in front of the officers they presented their revolvers at their heads, desired them to remain still, sent Jack Marsh inside for the arms desired the men to retire inside the station, and left one of their gang to mount guard over the prisoners.

This operation was performed very quietly, and the horses' head turned toward the bank.

Frank, Bill Polk and Nash dismounted at the door. Frank entered first, and, presenting a piece of paper which the clerk took for a check, suddenly drew his six-shooter—an operation imitated by his assistants—and swore, if the astonished clerk did not deliver up his cash and the keys of the safe, his passage from this world would be more speedy than he would desire. The manager at this moment came out from the inner office, upon which Bill Polk pointed his revolver at the midriff of the electrified banker, and desired him to "look sharp and cash up" without delay.

Binding the clerk and the manager and placing them in different rooms, the doors of which they locked, the band rode off quietly with their booty.

Of course, in a short time the victims made known the robbery, when the consternation was at fever height.

"It's James; no one but Frank James would chance it," was the universal cry.

The police, who had also been similarly locked up, looked very small and very vexed.

The instant they were gone the terrified wife and daughter of the cashier appeared and liberated the two unfortunate men, one of whom, the clerk, rode off to the police station, where he learned how the occupants of that building had been treated.

Returning to the rendezvous the plunder was divided and the band separated.

Frank James appointing a time and place for their next meeting.

CHAPTER IX.

Frank James felt it to be safer for the band to travel singly especially after the affair at Pine Bluff.

He had not gone very far on his lonely way when he found himself a prisoner.

He had been seized from behind and thrown from his horse.

Cool and collected, Frank knew that he was not well known in Arkansas. He had hopes, therefore, to evade the law even though he was now a prisoner.

He, with the greatest *sang froid*, asked what they meant by arresting a respectable farmer in that manner. He was told that a number of sheep had been stolen, and from the description they imagined he was one of the thieves.

"You are wrong, as I can easily prove," said Frank.

"Well, in the morning we shall produce our witnesses to identify you."

"All serene."

Frank was taken to a small country police station and placed in a cell for the night.

"Twelve" struck from the station clock and Frank slept soundly.

"One," and the men on watch reported the prisoner sleeping.

"Two," the same report.

The captain in charge gave orders that the prisoner need not be longer watched, as he evidently intended to have a good night's rest.

"Three" struck, but Frank James did not hear it.

He had quietly loosened the bars across his cell window, lowered himself out, found his horse, and bade adieu to his hospitable friends.

Very unceremonious, but, perhaps, more pleasant for Frank than if he had remained for identification next day.

He rode on about three miles, and then, finding a house where he was told a friend resided, he knocked.

The door was opened after a long while, during which time Frank was in anxious suspense.

When the door showed a light on Frank's face, the host stepped quickly back and asked:

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Avenger and—"

"Come in," said the man, evidently understanding the password.

Frank entered, and found, as he had been told, a good friend of Jesse James in the owner of the house.

Frank told him of his escape, and both agreed that it would be safer to resume his journey at once.

A pleasant hour was spent at the farm-house and Frank promised to pay his hospitable host another visit soon.

After a hearty meal, Frank thanked the man for his hospitality, and once more started on his road. He was in high

spirits, had a good horse, and congratulated himself on his wonderful escape from prison. A few hours ago he had never expected to breathe the air of freedom, and he laughed to himself as he thought over the way he had outwitted the police and jailers. Not one feeling of regret or remorse entered his mind. The outrages and crimes he had committed were, he considered, matters to exult over rather than regret. The law had no terror for him; he was brave and feared nothing, and openly declared that he cared neither for God nor man. Frank, of course, expected to be pursued, and knew there was every chance of being captured. But he had been in so many dangers and desperate situations that he did not despair of eluding his pursuers, in fact, he had begun to believe that he was protected by Providence, forgetting that a man's crimes are not always punished swiftly, and justice if slow is nearly always sure.

The daring recklessness of the man often saved him, when a more timid man would have been lost.

He had not proceeded far on his road along the rough highway, when he was startled to hear horses' hoofs behind him.

As they came nearer and nearer, Frank James glanced round as if seeking a hiding-place, but after a moment's hesitation decided to face it out whatever the danger might be.

Without once glancing back he continued to advance, although he felt curious enough to know what the horsemen were.

At last they came up with him, and Frank James saw that they were two young policemen evidently in pursuit of himself.

They pulled in their horses to give them breath, for they had been hardly ridden, judging by appearance.

"Good-morning," said James, as he too reined in, with a pleasant smile, as if highly delighted at the prospect of company for a few minutes. "You seem in a rare hurry. Going in search of sheep-stealers, I suppose?"

"We are going after bigger game than that," replied one of the policemen, "we are looking after Frank James, the train robber."

"Frank James!" repeated our hero. "I heard he was safe in prison. You don't mean to say he has escaped?" This in a horrified tone. "He ought to have been shot when first captured. The news you have just imparted to me will fill hundreds of people with alarm and dread."

"Yes," replied the young policeman who had spoken before and was evidently a more communicative man than the other; "but if I am not mistaken we shall soon capture him."

"You think so?" casually remarked Frank.

"Yes," the other replied. "I am certain."

"He is very cunning and clever, from what I hear," responded Frank James, "and, if what I hear is true, two men would stand a very poor chance with him. He can fight like the devil, and the knife and the pistol are weapons which he knows how to use better than any man in the country."

"We know all about that," cried the policeman, rather angrily, for his pride was hurt at Frank's insinuation that they were no match for the notorious outlaw: "but we have no reason to be afraid if we come across him. We are well-armed and well-mounted, and besides have the feeling that we are in the right. Frank James fights with a rope round his neck. He is the biggest scoundrel that ever lived, and must be hunted down like a rat. The highwaymen in the old days were saints to the man who has made his name the terror of the west."

"If every man got his deserts, few would go unpunished," said Frank, with a laugh, turning away his face to hide the look of rage that disfigured every feature.

For one moment he felt inclined to draw his pistol from his belt and shoot the policeman through the head, but he conquered the impulse, reflecting that it would do no good.

These two policemen might not be by themselves; others might be following close behind. If Frank James was a bad man, he was not a fool. No one could accuse him of that. Besides, he was afraid that the report of his pistol might attract attention.

Nothing in his manner evinced that he had any hostile feelings against his companions.

He spoke craftily of his own escape, trying to find out how much they knew, and keeping a keen watch upon them without appearing to do so.

The police seemed in no hurry to part company with him, and presently Frank fancied he saw them exchange significant glances as much as to say, "This is our man."

But not a muscle in his face betrayed the conviction that was in his mind, that they had discovered his identity.

He talked and laughed pleasantly enough, and wished them every success in their undertaking.

"If I were you I should not like the job," he said, presently, "but perhaps after all folks exaggerate about Frank James' power and pluck."

"We do not underrate his powers," said the policeman, significantly, and then, as if by accident, he pulled his rein, and Frank found himself between the two horsemen.

"The rascal will not surrender without a desperate struggle," observed James, with a look of menace in his eyes.

He saw that they were rapidly approaching a police-station and there was no time to be lost, and suddenly pulling out a short, black pipe, asked one of his would-be captors in a nonchalant way for a light.

"Oh, I'll get you one close by," was the reply, as off No. 1 went to the police-station, which just hove in sight, to get more than the light required.

No sooner had he disappeared than Frank, drawing a pistol from his pocket, swore he would scatter No. 2's brains if he did not at once dismount.

The persuasive eloquence of the muzzle of the pistol had the desired effect, and down jumped the lad (for he was nothing more), and allowed Frank James to take hold of the bridle.

"Good-bye, my friend," he coolly said. "The prison isn't made, or the traps born, that are a match for Frank James."

With a loud laugh, he rode rapidly away, leading the trooper's horse with him, to "keep him," as he said, "in good company."

When No. 2 arrived at the police-station, great was the chagrin and rage at the success of the *ruse*. The police, on hearing of his escape, rose with loud yells of anger and disappointment, and, mounting their horses, started in pursuit.

They were not only eager to reap the great reward, but they now had a personal grievance against Frank James, and wanted to be revenged upon him for the success of his "dodge."

In fact, they were cruelly mortified.

Frank, now perfectly calm and self-possessed, urged forward his horses as he heard the shouts of his pursuers behind him.

He necessarily rode blindly along the first path that presented itself.

It was a race for life and liberty once more, and all caused by his own folly.

The policemen fired more than once, but the bullets whizzed over Frank's head, and he gave a shout of derisive and laughing defiance as his horse dashed forward at hot and headlong speed.

The men, as can be easily imagined, did not spare their steeds, and Frank James, hearing another shout of triumph, looked back and saw that his pursuers were gaining upon him.

He resolved to keep the second horse with him, and change steeds when his weight began to tell upon that he rode.

He made up his mind instantly that if they came much nearer he would turn and fight.

A sinister light gleamed in his eye as he listened to the yells and oaths of the enraged men.

His position was desperate indeed, but he did not despair; he never did—the secret of success.

He was flying along at full speed, without following any particular direction, when he glanced ahead, and a smothered cry escaped from his lips.

Just in his path, just before him, was a wide gully, cutting off his retreat, and he must turn and face the policemen, or take this awful, this terrible leap.

In an instant his mind was made up.

There was only one thing to be done. He would not attempt the leap.

The pace had been a killing one.

His horse was distressed, and those of his followers were not much less so.

He resolved, as he said, to "burst the lot," and so pressed his animal still more with spur and hand.

He had the satisfaction of gaining on his pursuers.

He saw they were flagging, and that the men were somewhat done up from excitement.

He avoided the leap, and turned sharply toward the shrub, and for a few minutes was hidden from view.

He rapidly changed horses, and mounting the led one, felt he now really had the foot of the field.

The time occupied in the change had allowed his enemies to gain on him, and a loud howl of delight pealed from their lips as they thought they had him at last.

They were quickly deceived, for they now felt he was leaving them at every stride.

Seeing further pursuit useless, they moderated their pace, upon which Frank likewise "drew it milder," and, mocking his friends with what the French call a *pied-a-nez*, begged them to go and get the reward and drink his health.

"Never saw such a thing in all my life," said the first policeman.

"Faith, and it bates Bannager Biddy," replied the second, who was an Irishman, "and Biddy bates me."

And they rode away.

Frank gave a deep sigh of relief, and laughed mockingly as he continued on his way.

At present, at least, he was out of danger—but for how long?

He did not allow his horse to relax his pace, but rode hard till night came on, looking back every now and then to convince himself that he was not being followed, until it was too dark for him to see any object distinctly, when he allowed his steed to take it easy.

He had entered the wild scrub, and was slowly moving through the long grass, when he suddenly saw a faint light in the distance, and knew that he was nearing some habitation.

CHAPTER X.

Frank James hesitated, but only for a moment, as to whether he should crave hospitality at the house where he saw the light burning.

He was weary, and his horse needed rest, and so he thought that it would be as well to get an hour's rest, even if he had to obtain it in the way that he had often been compelled to in times past, viz: at the revolver's muzzle.

He rode up to the door and knocked loudly. The door was opened by a lady, who asked:

"Who's there?"

Instead of answering, Frank, who had dismounted, quietly walked into the house.

A brusque-looking gentleman was sitting near the stove, whilst two ladies were clearing the supper things away.

The gentleman, Captain Cathcart, rose to his feet, and was perhaps about to try and turn the intruder out, when he was stopped by Frank, exclaiming:

"Keep your seat, sir, please!"

Captain Carhart indignantly inquired the object of his visit and the meaning of his conduct. The stranger coolly replied:

"I want my supper."

The indignant host responded that, while their latch-string always hung on the outside, and their cheer was free to all, yet to such intrusive guests as he there was no welcome and no supper. There were a town and hotels four miles distant, and he could betake himself thither as abruptly as he had invaded his house.

"Did you hear what I said? I want my supper," calmly replied the stranger.

"We do not keep a hotel, and our supper is long over," said Captain Carhart.

With the same ironical coolness, the unbidden guest said:

"Did you understand me? I want my supper."

With that the captain made a demonstration as if to arise, and others of the household group began to manifest alarm and indignation, but the imperturbable stranger commanded:

"Keep your seats. Do not any of you attempt to leave the room."

A sort of revelation flashed over the captain's mind. He kept his seat and photographed the stranger on his vision.

About his waist was a broad belt, and from beneath the skirts of his coat ominously peeped the muzzles of two large revolvers. The captain fumbled at his watch and chain in a futile effort to release them from their receptacles and transfer them to a safer hiding-place, for he had begun to realize that he was confronting a desperado and robber instead of the drunken man he had at first supposed him to be.

The unbidden guest explained that he had ridden hard and far and had eaten but little for twenty-four hours, and that while he regretted to alarm or put to inconvenience the family, he was compelled to satisfy the hunger of himself and horse. He inquired if there was negro about the premises, and upon being told that there was, he demanded that one of the ladies send him in.

The demand was complied with, and the frightened darkey approached and received orders to go to the stile take his horse to the barn, feed him, remain with him until he had finished eating, bridle and saddle him and return him to the stile.

The negro immediately obeyed orders and the ladies in the meantime prepared supper. The captain was required to remain with his mysterious guest. He soon made friends with the children, chatted with them pleasantly, and courteously apologized to his astonished host for his conduct.

He said he was an outlaw and was being pursued, and that he knew not who were friends or enemies, and that he could trust nobody, therefore his reasons for requiring those who could give an alarm or do him an injury, to remain under his guardianship.

He chatted with the captain about war incidents, and was well posted on all events of recent occurrence, but he did not disclose his name or identity, where he was from or whither he was going.

Supper was announced, and then he required all the household to repair with him to the dining-room and remain with him till he had finished.

When they returned to the sitting-room, he asked one of the ladies to play and sing.

His request was complied with, and the young daughter of the captain sang, with exquisite grace, Claribel's pretty song, "Five o'clock in the morning."

Frank thanked her with all the airs of a gentleman, and then when she rose from her seat, he took his place at the piano, and, playing his own accompaniment, sang in a rich, baritone voice:

THE OUTLAW'S SONG.

Our fire on the turf, and our tent 'neath a tree—
Carousing by moonlight, how merry are we?
Let the lord boast his castle, the baron his hall,
But the house of the outlaw is widest of all.
We may shout o'er our cups, and laugh loud as we will,
Till echo rings back from wood, welkin and hill;
No joys seem to us like the joys that are lent
To the wanderer's life and the outlaw's tent.

Much crime and some folly may fall to our lot;
We have sins, but pray, where is the one who has not?
We are rogues, arrant rogues; yet remember! 'tis rare
We take but from those who are able to spare.
You may tell us of deeds justly branded with shame,
But if rich ones heard truth, you could tell them the same;
There's many a king would have less to repent,
If his throne was as pure as the outlaw's tent.

Pant ye for beauty? Oh, where would ye seek
Such bloom as is found on the tawny one's cheek?
Our limbs, that go bounding in freedom and health,
Are worth all your pale faces and coffers of wealth.
There are none to control us, we rest or we roam,
Our will is our law, and the world is our home;
E'en Jove would repine at his lot if he spent
A night of wild glee in the outlaw's tent.

The party thanked the bold outlaw for his excellent song.

Frank then said he would like two hours' sleep. He was shown to an up-stairs room, requiring his host, with lighted lamp, to precede him. He gave peremptory instructions for nobody to leave the house, and at the expiration of the two hours to arouse him by calling him from below, and not by any means attempt to come up stairs. He threw himself, clothed, upon the bed, his revolvers behind him.

The captain returned to the family room and began to talk with bated breath about the mysterious events of the evening. But in a few moments the stranger came down stairs and announced that he could not sleep above, it was too high from the ground, and requested to lie upon the floor of the room in which they were seated. A pair of blankets and pillow were provided, and soon the man was restlessly sleeping.

At the appointed time he was aroused. He summoned the darkey, learned that his horse was in waiting, gave the darkey a dollar, and proffered pay for the trouble he had

given the family, but this was declined. He, however, filled the children's hands with coins.

He apologized to the ladies for his intrusion and thanked them for all their kindness.

He then said:

"If it is any interest to you to know who I am I will tell you. My name is Frank James."

Guess, if you can, the astonishment on every face.

"But he was a nice man," said one of the young ladies.

However nice he was, Captain Cathcart was glad to see his visitor jump on his horse and ride away.

The events which followed caused Captain Cathcart oftentimes to talk of Frank James' visit as he passed through Arkansas to avenge his brother's death.

CHAPTER XI.

Frank James arrived in Missouri, and, the better to carry out his schemes of vengeance, determined to lull the authorities to sleep.

At St. Louis, Frank James staid at the same hotel on May 27th last as did Sheriff Timberlake and Marshall Craig.

Frank knew of their whereabouts, but they did not recognize him. The bold outlaw next paid a visit to Kansas City, and there commenced his lullaby to the governor and the other officials of the state.

What he did and how he did it can best be told by an interview the authorities had with Frank's lawyer.

R. J. Haire, a Kansas City lawyer, who has ever since the killing of Jesse appeared to speak with authority on things connected with the Jameses, says he speaks by the card when he says:

"Governor Crittenden has given a written promise for the pardon of Frank if he shall surrender within a certain period, and that the document is in the possession of Frank, to whom it was forwarded."

"Why did Timberlake and Craig come to St. Louis if they had nothing to do with the matter?" I asked.

"They got wind of the proceedings and came here to capture Frank. They were not only accompanied by several detectives, but also by Dick Little. In brief, they knew I was in communication with Frank and they expected to get a clew from my actions. I trust they are satisfied."

"Do you find it easy to reach Frank?"

"It is the most difficult thing I ever undertook. Since the killing of Jesse he has almost melted in total obscurity. On some days I am enabled to communicate with him in a few hours, and the next thing I know it requires several days. He is restless and always moving, so that it is almost impossible to hasten the negotiations."

"Would you show me the letter addressed to Frank by Governor Crittenden?"

"No, sir, because I did not say it was in my possession; and wherever it may be it is a solemn secret not to be divulged until the proper time arrives. I presume it is no violation of confidence to say that such a letter is in existence and in the possession of Frank James' friends."

"Are Frank's friend's desirous that he should accept the amnesty?"

"Most assuredly, and they are bringing every argument to bear to have him surrender. This is the critical moment—the turning point in Frank's life. If he should accept, the reformation will be complete, but if the negotiations are not satisfactorily concluded I predict he will proceed to the bush and rush headlong on till his death occurs. That is one great reason why I am particularly anxious to secure his surrender. He never before came so near settlement as now, and it will be a matter for deep regret and concern if he should refuse."

"Does Crittenden feel kindly disposed toward Frank?"

"He evidently desires to extend the utmost clemency, for in his letter he uses this sentence: 'Let us join in the noble effort to reform this man and restore him to a peaceful and honorable citizenship.' To my mind the governor intends to break up the remainder of the gang by peaceful means, and will use all lawful means in that direction."

All this from the recognized attorney of the James family seems confirmed by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Frank James at Independence, Mo., her former home, from nobody seems to know exactly where, and her announcement that she has come home to stay. She refuses to say where Frank is or to talk about him at all.

Mrs. Zerelda Samuels, mother of the notorious James boys, accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Frank James, was at the residence of Colonel Sam Ralston, near Independ-

ence, and left on the morning of May 30th in company with Sheriff Timberlake for Jefferson City. The result or object of last night's visit cannot be learned just now, but the impression is very strong there that Frank is in the neighborhood and that he met his mother last night. Mrs. Frank James has been indisposed since her arrival, being worn out by the long journey. She treats her old friends with extreme cordiality, but refuses positively to go out or meet strangers. The people will anxiously await the result of Mrs. Samuels' visit to Governor Crittenden. Notwithstanding all this it is difficult to see what terms the governor can offer that Frank could accept. It is altogether improbable that he will be so foolish as to give himself up even if the governor were willing to enter into any agreement with him. If he made a settlement with Missouri, which secured him amnesty after trial, Minnesota, Texas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and other states would be to hear from—not to speak of the United States government, which would want him for robbing mails.

I then went off to see the governor, and found him as pert as you please.

He evidently had Frank James on the brain, for the moment we mentioned the outlaw's name, the excellent governor put his hand in the direction of his hip pocket.

I immediately disarmed him by telling him that we were only a special envoy from Mr. J. W. Morrison, the publisher of the most authentic accounts of the James boys' career.

That pleased his excellency and he said he was ready to answer questions.

In response to questions the governor said that he was surprised at the way some of the papers were publishing accounts concerning the matter; that he has not offered a pardon to Frank James through Mr. Haire or any other person. A pardon could not be granted before conviction and he makes no rash promises. He has never received a line from Mr. Haire in regard to pardon or other form of executive clemency in behalf of the outlaw. He has not by word or otherwise, made a proposition to the governors of other states, asking them to join him in extending clemency to James. The governor also states that Frank James has never applied to him for clemency or pardon; that when he desires a pardon it is presumable he will apply for it after a conviction for some of his crimes. Then he certainly would have the same right as others to ask such clemency.

When asked what course he would pursue should a pardon for Frank James be applied for, his excellency, replied:

"That is my business, and when such application is made I shall act as I please, regardless of importunities or curses; and I wish to state also, that Mr. Haire, provided he is correctly reported by the sensational papers, is doing much unnecessary and loose talk concerning the matter, and pursuing an injudicious course. A noted bandit may have cause to pray for deliverance from such a friend, and further, that the words attributed to me by Haire, in an interview with a reporter of a St. Louis evening newspaper, 'Let us join in the noble effort to reform this man and restore him to a peaceful and honorable citizenship,' were never used by me to Mr. Haire, or anyone else. But suppose I had used them, is it not better to secure and reform them than to forever condemn and punish? As the executive of this state, I will pursue such a course as will, in my estimation, secure the enforcement of the law, and give full security and protection to life and property in the manner which to me seems wisest, and leave my administration to be judged by the result, fully believing that the people in their sober second thought will measure my administration more by results than by the profusion of unmerited abuse poured upon it by an inimical and venal press. Nor will I be checked in that course by the ravings of a few sensational editors, whose patriotism is alone measured by the number of their papers daily sold."

CHAPTER XII.

A DARING MOVE.

We have seen the deep ruse made use of by the outlaw and his friends, now let us go to the outlaws' retreat and we shall see some old faces.

* * * * *

"By Jove, Jim, I didn't know you," said Frank, as he entered a cabin on the mountain side.

Before the outlaw stood an old man. His body was bent apparently with age, his long white hair hung on his shoulders, and as he leaned on his strong cane, one would have

Frank James recognized in the old man, his companion in many a raid—Jim Cummins.

Now the said Jim was only about thirty-eight, so the disguise was for an object.

"I have been paying my respects to the bank," said Jim, resuming his natural voice.

"With what prospect?"

"Three of us can do the trick," answered Jim.

"What gain?" asked Frank.

"Should imagine about ten thousand dollars," responded Jim.

"Then let us arrange for to-morrow."

"What about horses?" asked one of the men who had listened to the conversation.

"We shall want six," said Frank, interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Farmer Jones has three, and—"

"Mrs. Byrne two more," interrupted Jim Cummins.

"That will do then," said Frank, "for I know where I can put my hand on the fastest mare in Missouri."

Arrangements were then made for each of the five men to meet Frank at two o'clock the following day.

* * * * *

The little town of Brookfield, in Linn county, was minding its own business on Tuesday, June 6, 1882.

Brookfield claims to have about fifteen hundred inhabitants.

It is a peaceable, law-abiding town.

At half past three on the day above noted, the quiet of the people was rudely broken, and some of the older people listened, rubbed their eyes to see if they were really awake, then looked at the calendar.

"For it seems like war times," said an old man.

Crack! crack! crack!

A regular fusillade of pistol shots were heard in the street. The more daring inhabitants looked out of their houses and saw six men well mounted.

They were all masked.

One had long, white hair, and seemed quite a patriarch. The others were strongly-built, daring men.

All were armed with pistols. A revolver in each hand, the men guiding their horses by the bridles held in their teeth.

Crack! crack!

Every man kept firing as rapidly as he could as he rode up the street.

The people were terrorized.

The bank was reached, and then the old gentleman and three others entered the building.

The remaining two, holding the horses, and firing an occasional shot as any inhabitant put his head outside the door of his residence.

Inside the bank there were only the cashier and the daughter of the president.

The party of masked men entered, and the aged one took off his mask, and walked up to the counter.

"I have come, you see, to open an account," he said.

"You—you—are the gentleman who called the other day?" stammered out the cashier.

"Yes," answered Jim Cummins.

Frank and Tom Malloy then walked round the counter, whilst Jim and his friend covered the pretty girl and the cashier with their revolvers.

Frank and Tom quickly emptied the cash drawers and safe, and then as quickly as they had rode into the town, they left the bank, mounted their horses, and rode away to the mountains.

"Like old times, eh, Jim?" exclaimed Frank James.

"Yes, and the money will be useful," responded Jim Cummins.

"Aye, so it will, for we have a big work before us. Never shall I rest until my brother is avenged."

The party counted up the spoils and found that they had bagged nearly twelve thousand dollars.

The next day the cables flashed the intelligence to every city that Frank James is not dead.

No, nor do we expect he will die until he has made his name a greater terror than it is even now.

Frank James and Jim Cummins rode away to Independence, where doubtless they will stay until they can develop some new and daring enterprise.

Some of the bank robbers were captured a day or two afterward, but the daring leader is still at large.

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